

Better ways to control pests

California schools are scoring higher in pest management. With help from DPR's School IPM Program.

Since the early 1990s, DPR has worked with school districts to make IPM – integrated pest management – the preferred way to manage pests in classrooms, cafeterias, and playgrounds.

“With an emphasis on pest prevention and least-toxic pest control methods, IPM appeals to parents, teachers, and school administrators alike,” said David Duncan, chief of DPR’s Pest Management and Licensing Branch, which oversees the program. “It’s also a good way to educate the public about the basics and benefits of reduced-risk pest management.”

School IPM picked up momentum in 2000, when Governor Davis made it part of his Children’s Health Initiative and approved specific funding as part of DPR’s budget. Later that year, the Legislature passed the Healthy Schools Act (Assembly Bill 2260). It codified DPR’s voluntary school IPM program and added new Education Code requirements, including advance notification and posting provisions.

In response to the Healthy Schools Act, DPR staffers have conducted training sessions around the state for school administrators, maintenance supervisors, and others so they could offer IPM instruction to their employees. Despite State Budget cutbacks in 2002, DPR will continue to offer IPM training to interested school districts, though at a slower pace.

DPR also supported a model program for school IPM in cooperation with the Marin County Agricultural Commissioner and the Marin County Office of Education. Supported by \$177,000 in DPR Pest Management Alliance grants, the program included a School IPM Expo in 2001. The Expo demonstrations and exhibits attracted more than 200 participants from 19 school districts in 18 counties.

“Our purpose was to provide hands-on, practical information that could be applied in a variety of school settings,” said Marin Agricultural Commissioner Stacy Carlsen. “While schools present a very challenging environment for IPM, we were able to demonstrate that low-risk pest management pays off in the long run, and we received many inquiries from school districts that were eager to learn more.”

To make school IPM information more accessible statewide, DPR created the School IPM Web site, www.schoolIPM.info. It includes sample letters that can be used to notify parents about prospective pesticide applications, least-toxic pest management alternatives, a 424-page model school IPM guidebook, and other information.

A unique resource is School IPM HELPR, a cooperative project involving DPR and the University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Project. Users can look up UC IPM recommendations for managing a specific pest, and then link to a page that summarizes environmental and health information for each management tactic mentioned. Users can view information on toxicology, exposure, available products, and regulatory status in a convenient tabular format.

To encourage pesticide users to adopt pest-fighting techniques that are friendlier to the environment and human health. That's the goal of DPR's IPM Innovator Awards, Pest Management Grants, and Pest Management Alliances.

IPM INNOVATORS: Since 1994, DPR has given out more than 70 IPM Innovator Awards to honor California organizations that emphasize pest prevention, favor least-hazardous pest control, and share their successful strategies with others. (IPM – integrated pest management – works with nature to encourage beneficial plants and animals while making it difficult for pests to survive.) In 2002, these high achievers were named IPM Innovators: the Kern High School District, Self-Insured Schools of California, the City of Santa Cruz, and Clos du Bois Winery.

GRANTS AND ALLIANCES: DPR's Pest Management Grants and Pest Management Alliances are two other key elements in the Department's comprehensive, reduced-risk pest management strategy. The State's fiscal crisis forced a suspension of the Grant programs for 2002-03. Since they were instituted in 1996 and 1998, more than \$8 million has gone to 241 projects ranging from small-scale applied research and demonstration to large-scale regional or statewide implementation of multi-disciplinary reduced-risk practices.

AN ALMOND SUCCESS STORY: The Almond Pest Management Alliance, funded since 1998, features orchard sites in Butte, Stanislaus and Kern counties that compare various growing conditions and disease and pest pressures. More than a thousand growers and pest control advisers have attended regional field days to hear researchers review their work and share results.

Pesticide use on almonds has declined from 16 million pounds in 1998 to 10 million pounds in 2001. Particularly encouraging has been the steady decline in acres treated with dormant-season organophosphate (OP) insecticides. Applied during the winter to many orchard crops, residues of these insecticides have caused problems when rainfall washed them into rivers and streams. Although some of this decrease in OP use might be explained by weather and pest pressures, most has occurred because growers decided to use other, mostly reduced-risk, practices. Alternatives include dormant applications of pyrethroids, *Bacillus thuringiensis*, and oil, and in-season use of these insecticides. However, the most commonly used alternative is simply no dormant insecticide at all. This does not mean growers are doing nothing else to control key insect pests. Innovative farm practices, such as orchard sanitation and conserving beneficial arthropods in farm fields, are effective ways to reduce the use of more hazardous pesticides.

